

Hello I'm a Biologist with the Department of Public Works Environmental Division, and I'm here to talk to you about Fort Irwin's natural resources. Natural resources include wildlife, plants and aquatic habitats found throughout the installation. DPW assists with protecting and managing these resources, but it is also a job that you play a big part in, too. One of the most important parts of our job is protecting species found in this area that are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The Lane Mountain milk vetch is a fragile plant listed as an endangered species. It is found nowhere else in the world, but the West Mojave Desert and much of their habitat is right here at Fort Irwin. This plant may be sensitive to dust and other pollutants that can be generated by human activities. You can reduce this air quality problem by driving slowly on dirt roads and staying on designated roadways. Every time you drive off-road, you kill plants,

disturb soil crusts and increase the amount of bare soil that erodes and blows away. There are also lands on Fort Irwin that are protected as Conservation Areas. These are signed areas that are strictly off-limits or “No Dig” zones.

The desert tortoise, the California State reptile, is found here at Fort Irwin and is a federally threatened species. In the past 15 years, local populations have declined significantly, many as much as 90 percent. Threats that reduce tortoise populations include disease, being run over by vehicles, habitat loss, and predation by subsidized predators like the coyote and raven. We’ll talk more about subsidized predators in a moment. It is our responsibility here at Fort Irwin to preserve and protect this amazing part of the Mojave Desert. The desert tortoise is a reptile specially adapted to life in the desert. The tortoise gets most of the food and water it needs in the spring time after winter rains. Desert tortoises spend the majority of

their time in self constructed burrows. A tortoise's burrow is vital to its survival. They spend approximately 90 percent of their lives in burrows which protect them from the heat of the summer and the cold during winter. Threats from human activities include crushing burrows, sometimes with the tortoise still inside, by driving off roads and MSR's. If you do encounter a tortoise downrange in a training area, you must halt training immediately, place someone to guard the tortoise and contact an Observer Controller, also called an OC, or Range Control who in turn will contact a biologist with the Department of Public Works. If a tortoise is accidentally killed or injured, you must report it to an OC or Range Control immediately. Never purposefully kill, injure, harm or harass a desert tortoise. Do not remove shells or eggs from the wild. Doing any of these things violates the Endangered Species Act and can involve expensive fines and even jail time. I mentioned predator subsidy earlier. Some populations of animals native to the Mojave Desert have

expanded their ranges and numbers due to human activities that provide/subsidize them with an easy source of food, water and shelter. The two most common wild animals you will encounter at Fort Irwin are **coyotes and ravens**. Human presence in the desert has artificially helped these animals so much that their populations have exploded. These two species are also major predators of tortoises and out-compete dozens of other native species for precious desert resources. It is up to you to prevent these subsidies by properly disposing of ALL of your garbage and uneaten food – including MRE packaging. Around cantonment, keep dumpsters closed and NEVER give handouts of food or water to coyotes. It may seem you are being kind to the animal at first, but in the long run, almost every coyote that becomes habituated to humans ends up a dead or diseased coyote. So again, it's your duty to keep your work and home area clean of potential food and water items and always close garbage dumpsters and garbage containers.

There are thousands of plant and animal species native to the Mojave Desert and Fort Irwin. This land may not seem capable of providing a home for so many creatures and most of them are not easy to find, but the land all around you is home to many. Hundreds of species of snakes, lizards, birds, insects, mammals as well as nearly 2,000 different species of plants rely on the fragile desert and its scarce resources to make a living. You can help them all out while you're at Fort Irwin by being aware of the things we've talked about here:

- 1) Dispose of your garbage and food properly.
- 2) Stay on existing roads and don't create new ones.
- 3) Watch and photograph but do not disturb plants and animals.
- 4) Report sightings of desert tortoises to your OC, Range Control or call DPW.

Thank you for your time. Enjoy your stay, and if you have any questions about Fort Irwin's wildlife, please feel free to contact us.

Located in Bldg. 602

Phone Number (760) 380-3740